United Nations CRC/C/BGR/Q/3-5/Add.1

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
10 May 2016

English only

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Seventy-second session
17 May-3 June 2016
Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Consideration of reports of States parties

List of issues in relation to the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Bulgaria

Addendum

Replies of Bulgaria to the list of issues*, **

[Date received: 18 April 2016]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.
** The annex to the present document is on file with the Secretariat and is available for consultation.

GE.16-07543(E)
1607543

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Part I

Response to the questions raised in paragraph 1 of the List of issues (CRC/C/BGR/Q/3-5)

1. Monitoring of the court practice in the Republic of Bulgaria reveals that court panels invoke specifically the Convention on the Rights of the Child in preparing their arguments when issuing decisions. Usually such invoking is present in divorce proceedings and proceedings related to exercise of parental rights and parental responsibility.

Paragraph 2

2. The draft Child Act was not adopted due to the strong public resentment against it. The main point of discussion was child empowerment. Many parental organisations stated that the act granted too many powers to children. Therefore, the State decided to launch actions for raising awareness of the right of children to participate in decision-making. Thus, through the Children's Council at the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) a Mechanism for child participation at four levels was developed. The external evaluation of such participation, conducted by an independent international expert, showed that a number of difficulties still existed, including the limited understanding of the child's participation both on individual and collective levels. As a key tool in addressing this challenge, it was recommended to make evaluation of child participation through the Assessment Tool of the Council of Europe. The evaluation itself will help to raise awareness of the application of Art. 12 of the Convention, thereby reducing oppositions.

3. The SACP continues to be the body coordinating the activities of the responsible institutions in the area of children's rights. The main strategic document is the National Strategy for Children 2008-2018, and, at operational level, coordination is performed through an annual National Programme for Child Protection, aligned to the Strategy. The Chairperson of the SACP has two advisory bodies:

- The National Council for Child Protection (NCCP), whose members include all bodies in charge of child protection, as well as NGOs. The NCCP meets at least twice a year and discusses policies on children;
- The Council of Children, comprising children from every administrative region in Bulgaria, and 5 additional quotas for children from vulnerable groups. Through it, the voice of children reaches the decision-makers.

Paragraph 3

4. In 2011, in implementation of the project "Evaluation of the implementation of the National Strategy for Children", an external, independent evaluation was made of its implementation for the first three years of its operation. The general finding is that there is not enough coordination among individual sectoral policies, impeding the achievement of the objectives set out in the Strategy. The document itself has some structural deficiencies, such as the lack of common shared vision, of defined mission and philosophy. Moreover, the monitoring indicators need to be complemented and the measures set out in the document need to be broadened. General recommendations are:

- The Strategy should be re-oriented from focusing only on children at risk to all children in Bulgaria, as a prerequisite for their comprehensive development;
- It is necessary to have a common understanding of all key terms used in the Strategy, since they lay down its philosophy and values;

- It is necessary to set up a small team within the SACP to monitor the overall application of the Strategy and to take decisions for revising its application, if necessary;
- It would be helpful to include a team of experts in strategic planning and change management to support and advise:
    - The process of unification of the terms;
    - The proposed management team;
    - The process of analyzing the problems and achieving a common understanding of the approaches that would help improve the status of children and a common shared vision of child welfare.

5. An ad hoc group is working on the update of the document and the main aim is to ensure better coordination among sectoral policies, focusing the efforts on prevention and family support.

Paragraph 4

6. In Bulgaria, budget allocations are classified in accordance with indicators of economic and functional nature, applied in their spending units' budget preparation and reporting, within the programme format of the budget. When a programme budget format is applied, expenditures are also classified by policy area/functional area and budget program by the relevant first-level spending units.

7. The budget framework of Bulgaria does not contain expressly defined targeted budget allocations for children in marginalised and vulnerable situations. Likewise, there are no expressly defined indicators for monitoring and evaluation and there is no system for cost planning and reporting by economic indicators to allow the tracking of their development over time.

8. The budget of Bulgaria and those of first-level spending units are public and are in compliance with the requirements of the Classified Information Protection Act.

9. In the field of support for families with children, as provided for in the Child Protection Act (CPA) and the Family Support for Children Act (FSCA), and the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for the respective year, two budget programs are being implemented: program "Child protection through transition from institutional care to alternative care in family environment" and program "Support to families with children".

Paragraph 5

10. General prohibition of discrimination is laid down in the Constitution. In addition to the Protection against Discrimination Act (PaDA), the Integration of People with Disabilities Act, the National Education Act, the CPA, etc., the State has expressly introduced special prohibitions against discrimination. All child protection bodies must comply with the non-discrimination principle. Special measures in favour of persons or groups of disadvantaged persons, on the grounds set out in Art. 4, paragraph 1,[1] aim to equalise their opportunities, when such measures are necessary, and to ensure special protection of children without parents, minors, single parents and persons with disabilities.

[1] Art. 7 of the PaDA.

11. A personal approach is applied to every child/youth in the course of deinstitutionalization. Protection of the rights of children and youths and ensuring their equal treatment and non-discrimination is a guiding principle.

12. In 2015, two bills were adopted, amending and supplementing the Asylum and Refugees Act (ARA). The amendments transposed the provisions of Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13.12.2011, Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26.06.2013 and Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26.06.2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection. Some of the supplements in the ARA aim to ensure stricter observance of the rights of children seeking protection and compliance with their best interests.

13. The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) exercises control and takes measures to protect minors who seek international protection against physical or psychological violence, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. The ARA lays down measures prohibiting and eradicating discrimination against aliens and unaccompanied minors who seek international protection (Art. 20).

14. Minors, who seek or have been granted international protection, are entitled to primary and secondary education, including vocational education and training, under the terms and procedure set out for Bulgarian citizens.

15. Access to the educational system by minors, who seek or have been granted international protection, may not be postponed by over three months from the date of filing the application for international protection.

16. Until now, there is no data on discrimination or on vases of refused access to the educational system to a child seeking protection.

Paragraph 6

17. Bulgaria has taken a series of measures to prevent injuries and traffic accidents involving children. Since 2014, this issue has been included in the National Programme for Child Protection. The local authorities responsible for safety within the relevant territorial administrative unit carried out many activities for inspecting the safety of old and crumbling buildings, water basins, etc. In the framework of the action "Conducting a thematic information campaign to children's ensure safety in disasters, fires and emergencies" the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) prepared and provided for free Internet download a Fire Safety Manual for Children and 28 documents for protection against disasters and accidents. Three competitions were held in the towns of Montana, Stara Zagora and Burgas, among members of the children's police academies, with the participation of 68 competing children.

18. In the review period, a National Campaign, namely "Child Safety – Shared Responsibility and Care", was held. Within this campaign, 30 instructions in 10 kindergartens and combined child institutions and in 10 schools and vocational secondary schools were delivered by experts of the SACP, the MoI and Sofia Municipality. 1,547 children at the age of 5 to 17 were covered.

19. Competitions for child drawings, photos and photo collages were held, conveying a message for safety and related to the child's perceptions of the risks of the surrounding environment, including demonstrating proper behaviour in preventing perils.

20. There has been an increase in the number of injuries and deaths in traffic accidents involving children. In the period 2011-2014, 114 children died in traffic accidents and 4,236 suffered heavy injuries. In 2014, children's deaths numbered 33, and children's injuries totalled 1,056. In 2013, 29 children died in traffic accidents and 1,133 were injured;

and in 2012, children's deaths were 26, and children's injuries were 1,080. Most children are injured as passengers in the cars of their parents. The analysis shows that the main reason is that the drivers (parents and relatives) do not ensure the safety of children in the vehicle, in accordance with the Roads Act.

21. Therefore, the MoI regularly holds campaigns for preventing traffic accidents involving children. Organisation is created on the territory of Bulgaria to cover all high school graduates, practical guidelines for safety during the parties and related journeys have been designed. The campaign "Vacation! Let's save children's lives on the road!" is implemented on the territory of the 28 regions in the country and is focused on reducing child traffic accidents during the summer vacation.

22. Before the end of the academic 2013/2014 year, over 711 seminars on safe travel were conducted before students and 120 meetings with parents were held. The film "Young Europe" was broadcasted more than 144 times before students aged over 17. Over 692 bus drivers driving students on excursions were checked. At the start of the academic 2014/2015 year, over 185 parental meetings were held on the topic of road safety with traffic police officials. 102 TV and radio programmes were broadcasted; interviews for the print and electronic media were made to promote child safety. MoI officials took part in the delivery of instructions in kindergartens and schools on the Road Safety topic.

23. Under the auspices of the MoI and the chair of the SACP, a National Programme for conducting the UN Third Global Road Safety Week for the Republic of Bulgaria, entitled "I want to grow up!" was organised. A Business Card thereof was produced and circulated in various forms, containing a message of Bulgarian children for more safety on the road.

24. Two prevention clips were produced, dedicated to the UN Third Global Road Safety Week: one video and one audio clip. They were circulated via central and local media and by publication on the websites of all partners, government authorities, and NGOs.

25. During all campaigns conducted by the competent bodies of the MoI, police operations for enhancing control on drivers were conducted in order to limit traffic accidents involving children. In addition, measures were taken to strengthen controls on parents driving their children improperly and on persons incorrectly crossing the road.

26. There is no information about any instituted criminal proceedings and prosecution against an employee of a specialised institution for mentally disabled children for causing the death of a child.

Paragraph 7

27. The legal regulation of the safeguards regarding the right of the children to be heard in civil, criminal and administrative proceedings is contained in Art. 15 of the CPA. According to its provision, all cases of administrative or judicial proceedings, affecting the rights and interests of a child, should provide for an obligatory hearing of the child, provided he or she has reached the age of 10, unless that proves harmful to his or her interests. Where the child has not reached the age of 10, he or she may be given a hearing depending on the level of his or her development. Before the child is given a hearing, the court or the administrative body shall provide the child with the necessary information, which would help him/her form his/ her opinion. The hearing of a child shall take place in appropriate surroundings in accordance with his/her age. In addition, the hearing and consultation of a child shall take place in the presence of a social worker from the Social Assistance Directorate (SAD) and when necessary – in the presence of another appropriate specialist. The court or the administrative body shall order for the hearing of the child to take place also in the presence of a parent, guardian or other close to the child person, unless when this is not in the child's best interest.

28. The Family Code (FC), the Civil Procedure Code (CPC) and the Penal Procedure Code (PPC) explicitly stipulate the right of children to be heard during court proceedings.

29. The FC provides for the hearing of children in specific court proceedings for divorce of parents. Pursuant to Art. 59, paragraph 6 of the FC, the court hears the parents and the children under the terms of Art. 15 of the CPA, takes an opinion from the SAD and hears other persons, if relevant.

30. In civil proceedings, Art. 177, paragraph 2 of the CPC sets out that where a party is a minor or is under full incapacity, the court may hear his/her legal representative, and where he/she is an underage person or under limited incapacity the court may interrogate him/her in the presence of a parent or guardian.

31. The PPC expressly stipulates the interrogation of an underage witness in the pre-trial (Art. 140 of the PPC) and trial (Art. 280 and Art. 281 of the PPC) stages of criminal proceedings. In this regard, Art. 140, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the PPC provides for an underage witness to be interrogated in the presence of a pedagogue or psychologist, and where necessary, also in the presence of a parent or guardian, if the respective body finds this necessary. The time and place of the interrogation are carefully chosen, since objective and subjective factors have a major role to play with children. The interrogation must be conducted during the day and preferably in the usual setting of the interrogated witness – kindergarten, school or another institution. Recommendations of the present psychologists shall be observed. The tactical methods to be used during the interrogation shall be in accordance with the level of physical and psychological development of the underage witness. It is not always appropriate to use summons to call an underage witness because this may allow exercise of external suggestion or cause frustration or fear in the child. It is important to note that during the interrogation of an underage witness, the interrogator clarifies the need for giving truthful evidence, without warning him/her of the liability for perjury, as laid down in the Penal Code (Art. 140, paragraph 4 of the PPC). The interrogation of an underage witness in the country may be done via video-conference (Art. 140, paragraph 5 of the PPC) as well, which allows for avoiding contact with the offender and prevents repeated victimisation.

32. In 2010, the PPC was amended in regard to the procedural rights of minor participants in criminal proceedings, so as to prevent psychological trauma during interrogation in the investigation stage. A new paragraph 6 of Art. 280 was created, according to which a underage witness who has been interrogated in the criminal proceedings may be interrogated again only when his/her testimonies cannot be read out under the terms and procedure of Art. 281 or his/her interrogation is of extraordinary importance for revealing the truth.

33. At present, a working group is set up at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for amending the PPC in order to transpose Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25.10.2012. One of the main principles in the Directive is the right of child victims to be heard in criminal proceedings and that such right shall not be prejudiced only on the ground that the victim is a child or based on the age of the victim.

Paragraph 8

34. Under the CPA, any child who is deprived of parental care or has become victim of abuse, violence, exploitation or any other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, either in or out of his or her family, or for whom there is a danger of causing damage to his or her physical, mental, moral, intellectual and social development, is a child at risk and relevant protection measures shall be taken. The CPA sets out a provision expressly mandating any person who becomes aware that a child needs protection to immediately notify the SAD, the SACP or the MoI. The same obligation accounts for persons who have

come to such knowledge in relation to their profession, even if they are bound by official secret.

35. The preparation of specialists, working with children, is also of high importance. It involves identification of the symptoms of violence and timely notification of the competent authorities.

36. Since 2010, a Coordination Mechanism of interaction in the cases of children who have suffered violence or are at a risk of violence and emergency intervention has been in force. The mechanism introduces inter-institutional cooperation at national and local level, and joint work on any specific case in a multi-disciplinary team, including representatives of government, municipal and other stakeholders involved in the specific case. The main goal of the Coordination Mechanism is to improve interaction among the institutions involved, and to find consistent and adequate responses to such cases.

37. The Prosecutor General of Bulgaria has issued Methodological Guidelines on improving the work of prosecutors in the institution and termination of criminal proceedings under Art. 151, paragraph 1 and Art. 191, paragraph 3 of the Penal Code (PC).

38. The Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation provides information to the SACP on a regular basis about the instituted criminal proceedings related to so-called early marriages or co-habitation with minors. Based on this information, the number of convicted persons with enforced court acts for 2014 under Art. 151, paragraph 1 of the PC is 54, and the number of sentenced persons under Art. 191, paragraph 3 – 143 persons, 39 persons for the first half of 2015 under Art. 151, paragraph 1, and 84 persons under Art. 191, paragraph 3.

Paragraph 9

39. The multilateral nature of the policies on children and family entails setting of interrelated objectives and development of integrated policies, aimed to: ensure the right of every child to have a family; ensure development of high quality community social services in support of child-rearing; reduce child poverty; and ensure sustainable implementation of the deinstitutionalization process.

40. Family support is provided in several ways – financial support, provision of social services, provision of opportunities for combining child-rearing and work, etc.

41. A wide network of social services in the community is set up at national level, aimed to prevent separation of children from their families. An important aspect of the work with children and their families is providing financial support to the most deprived families. The financial support to children and families is provided under the Family Allowances Act (FAA) and the CPA. It should be noted that most family allowances for children are provided regardless of the amount of family income. The purpose of this support is to reach more families as an incentive to raise children in family environment. Funds granted under the FAA are substantial.

42. From 1 January 2016, a new type of support is introduced – one-off support for adoption. The funds provided under the CPA play an important role for children at risk. The financial support to children and families is aimed at prevention of abandonment and reintegration, rearing children by close friends and relatives, and in foster families.

Paragraph 10

43. Under the Project "I have a family too", the financial resources spent to ensure the provision of foster care service and individual activities were analysed. The supporting components of the foster care service were specified, differentiated and evaluated, to guarantee its quality. A report was prepared by two external experts, with a reasoned draft of a Unified Financial Standard for the foster care service. It will serve as basis for

designing a final version of the Unified Financial Standard. An intergovernmental working group was also set up for further deliberation and finalisation.

44. Thanks to the quality recruitment and trainings delivered to candidates for foster care in 2015, the foster care commissions approved 525 foster families from 83 partner municipalities and the total number of the approved foster families was 1,686.

45. The family-type placement centres (FTPC) provide a residential place and the necessary care for adequate upbringing and development of children. They are aimed at creating conditions and perceptions among children of equal participation in the life of the community. The capacity of the centres is 6 to 15 children, in contrast to the previous residential services, where over 100 children were placed. This allows children to acquire skills for independent life, reduces the possibility of violence, etc. This small group home provides care in a close to home environment. One of the requirements to the organisation of the space in the buildings is for the house to be divided, so that three groups of children live relatively independently from one another, and external access is provided through separate entries. Therefore, the FTCP provides opportunities for personal space and personal items to every child, as well as common space for the activities of all children. The FTCP allows every child to take part in the maintenance of the household, in the meals preparation and serving, shopping, cleaning, etc. In terms of the organisation of everyday life, the main principle is to ensure active life in the community. This principle sets requirements to the location of the FTCP operation – in big settlements, near accessible educational, health care and cultural services. The FTCP does not provide educational or medical services, but it operates in the context of the total network of services in the community. The professional support at the FTCP is targeted at forming social skills and skills for independent life; emotional support and protection in emergency situations. Including the children in the life of the community is part of the actual deinstitutionalization of child care. To be able to meet the specific needs of children with disabilities, all members of the FTCP teams are subject to specialised trainings.

Paragraph 11

46. Children with disabilities are children at risk and the necessary measures for their protection are taken. Guided by the understanding of the integrated needs of children with disabilities and their families, measures are taken at national level for timely identification of the disability, diagnostics, study of the needs and provision of the necessary support. Coordinated policies at national level and active cooperation among different systems – health care, social care and education, are put in place for the fulfilment of these measures.

47. A child with disability can be identified in the maternity hospital. If a disease is identified at a later stage of a child's development, it is the general practitioner of the child that refers the child to a specialist and to an expert medical commission to identify the disease of the child and to issue an expert medical opinion on the degree of disability, on the need of assistance and on the need of subsequent treatment. In recent years, the procedure for issuing a medical opinion on children has been simplified. Annually, about 4,500-5,000 children under the age of 16 are certified to have disabilities, with expert decisions of Territorial Expert Medical Commission/National Expert Medical Commission, accounting for 4.5-5 per thousand children under the age of 16. The highest share is of disabled children with 50-90% reduced ability for social adaption; the share of children with over 90% permanently reduced ability for social adaption declined in the period: from 14.4% to 11.4%. The leading diseases of these children are birth defects, diseases of the nervous system, psychological and behavioural disorders.

48. The National Centre for Public Health and Analyses has been commissioned to conduct a statistical survey and analysis of child health indicators in different regions of the country (for a 3-year period, 2012-2014), and to prepare a Map of disease incidence by

group of disease and by region. In 2016, activities under the programme will continue to be performed and extended in order to ensure continuity and integrated care for pregnant women, mothers, and children and develop integration with social services in their support.

49. In this line, amendments have been proposed to the Medical-Treatment Facilities Act. They introduce a new type of facility – a centre for integrated service for children with disabilities and chronic diseases. It should provide "under one roof" a set of medical services, including support to families with children with disabilities and chronic diseases for appointing and conducting early diagnostics; diagnostics, treatment and medical and psycho-social rehabilitation; long-term treatment and rehabilitation, parent training; visits by medical specialists to provide special care to children with disabilities and heavy chronic diseases, raised in a family setting and in a resident type social service; and specialized palliative care for children.

50. Planning of such medical facilities is to be performed during the design of the National Health Card and the Concept for deinstitutionalization of child medical and social care homes.

51. A key focus and a step forward in the overall child and maternal health policy are the amendments to the Health Act. They elaborate the regulation of integrated social services, aimed to develop the model of care for vulnerable groups, including pregnant women, mothers, and children.

52. Providing support to children with disabilities is fully aligned with their individual needs. A key tool for the provision of such support are social services in the community for children with disabilities, including: Centres for Social Rehabilitation and Integration of Children, which provide advisory services related to rehabilitation performance, social and legal counselling, education and vocational training and orientation; Centres for Public Support, which provide advisory services in support of children and their families, psychological support, a set of social services for independent living and social integration; Day Care Centres for Children with Disabilities, which provide for overall care for children during the day and a possibility for week care.

53. The provision of integrated services for early childhood development is of essential importance for the quality support to children with disabilities. Therefore, new services were created under the project "Support for social inclusion", aiming to implement an innovative model of child care. One of the services involves early intervention in disabilities by training medical staff, direct work with children with disabilities and their families, rehabilitation in special centres and counselling activities, training, and mobile work with child and family in their home. Methodological guidelines were developed on the provision of the services "Early intervention in disabilities by establishing a Centre for Early Intervention in Disabilities", "Forming and developing parental skills", and "Family counselling and support". Over 1,300 specialists were hired (including paediatricians, psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, special pedagogues, gynaecologists, nurses, midwives, pedagogues, lawyers and mediators) and 19 providers of social services for children were licensed. The total number of consumers under the project is over 20,000, including children and parents. In 31 municipalities 1,867 new places were opened in crèches and kindergartens.

54. The families of children with disabilities receive social benefits under the national legislation with simplified procedures. Besides financial support, various allowances to cover the child's individual needs are also granted.

55. Under the project "Inclusive education", a new model of organisation and operation of support schools of residential type was established. It aims to ensure training, according to contemporary requirements in respect of mentally disabled children and children with multiple disabilities, to ensure building of knowledge and skills in accordance with the

individual needs of every child. Different integrated services are provided under this process – art therapy, kinesiotherapy, specialised foods corresponding to the health status of every child, work with parents, etc. As a result, a new model of organisation and operation of specialised schools for mentally disabled children was established. Integrated services and conditions for providing contemporary education were created without detachment from family setting, yet in compliance with the deinstitutionalisation process.

56. The new Pre-School and School Education Act provides for the establishment of Support Centres for Personal Development which will support children in the development of interests, skills, competences and performance in the fields of science, technologies, arts and sports; career orientation and counselling; preventive, diagnostic, rehabilitation, corrective and re-socializing work with infants and students; resource support to infants and students with special educational needs; pedagogical and psychological support; implementation of support and educational programs for families of infants and students with disabilities.

57. A new element is introduced in the educational process – "support for personal development" at two levels – primary and secondary. The secondary support level is complementary and reflects the specific needs of infants and students with additional resources in the environment to meet them. It covers: work with an infant or student on a specific case; psychological and social rehabilitation, hearing and speech rehabilitation, sight rehabilitation, rehabilitation of communication disorders and in case of physical injuries; providing accessible architectural, general and specialised supporting environment, technical aids, specialised equipment, didactic materials, methodologies and specialists; providing education on special academic subjects to students with sensor disabilities; and resource support.

58. Psychologists, pedagogical advisors, speech therapists, social workers and resource teachers work in kindergartens and schools for general and supplementary support.

59. A new process is established in the new Pre-School and School Education Act regarding inclusive education as an integral part of the right to education.

60. Inclusive education is a process of understanding, accepting and support of the individuality of every infant or student and of the various needs of all infants and students by activating and including resources for eliminating the obstacles to study and learn and to the create new opportunities for development and participation in all aspects of the community's life. The National Educational Standard for Inclusive Education shall be adopted by an Ordinance of the Government.

Paragraph 12

61. Under the Health Insurance Act, all children (persons under 18 years of age) and the persons who have reached 18, if they study full time – until completion of secondary education, are health insured by the State at the expense of the state budget. This ensures access of children to a general practitioner, specialised medical care, and first aid.

62. Ordinances of the Minister of Health provide for preventive, promotional, diagnostic, treatment and rehabilitation medical activities. All children are subject to preventive examinations under the Child Health Program of the National Health Insurance Fund. The type, frequency and regularity of preventive examinations of children and pregnant women are set out in Ordinance 39 on the preventive examinations and dispensary preventive check-ups.

63. Ordinance 40 provides for medical activities, guaranteed in primary and specialised outpatient medical care and in hospitals. It provides health insured pregnant women with preventive examinations during pregnancy, paid by the National Health Insurance Fund, as

well as with hospital medical care during childbirth or hospital treatment during pregnancy after childbirth, if necessary. For health uninsured pregnant women, the Ministry of Health pays a preventive examination during pregnancy and hospital medical care during childbirth.

64. The implementation of the National Programme for Improving Maternal and Child Health (2014-2020) began in September 2015. Funded under the programme are medical facilities for significant health activities, relating to the early diagnostics and treatment of certain diseases, when no other financing is provided. A mass universal neonatal hearing screening is introduced under the programme, for the purpose of early detection and timely intervention of hearing problems of newborn babies. Contracts for funding were signed with all medical facilities with maternity wards.

65. A mechanism for consulting imaging tests of prematurely-born babies with KetCat screening devices for retinopathy of prematurity was introduced in Sofia, with a possibility for highly specialised diagnostics, counselling and tracking of children.

66. Health-counselling centres for maternal and child health were opened in all regional cities in which medical doctors and other medical and non-medical specialists provide counselling and logistic services for integrated medical tracking of children, pregnant women at increased medical risk or existing chronic diseases and disabilities.

67. In support of such centres and in order to ensure highly specialised counselling for children with particular diseases, health counselling centres were established in 12 university hospitals for the following groups of child diseases: diabetes, congenital cardiac defects, congenital face defects, congenital haematological diseases, cystic fibrosis, prematurely-born babies, oncological diseases, cerebral palsy, and spinal muscular atrophy. Within the program, funds were provided for activities related to pre-natal pregnancy diagnostics in genetic laboratories of university hospitals in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Pleven and Stara Zagora.

68. In the framework of planned activities in the National Program for Prevention of Oral Diseases in children aged 0-18 in the period 2009-2014, a national epidemiological survey was conducted to identify the status of children from three age groups. Application of sealants to the first permanent teeth of children aged 6 to 8 years was performed by dental medical doctors, and health instructions were carried out in kindergartens and schools in the 28 administrative regions. Round tables were conducted to raise awareness among particular target groups; information, training materials and methodological guidelines for caries prevention and healthy nutrition were designed and circulated. Over 30,000 information and training materials were developed and circulated. In recent years, the indicators reveal significant and steady reduction in immunization levels as compared with those reported twenty years ago when the cover was nearly 100%. In most EU Member States, almost 100% of the children are covered by immunization. As of September 2013, it was reported that for an epidemiological period of 3 years about 200,000 children with incomplete or missing immunization status were vaccinated under the compulsory immunization schedule. The linking of compulsory immunizations and prevention examinations of children with the receipt of child benefits proved to be successful. Changes were made in the immunization schedule, extending the number of diseases which require compulsory immunizations, while providing highly purified combined vaccines. The immunization cover is over 95%, and for some vaccines it is 97%. Further efforts are planned, intended to improve the immunization cover of all children until achieving the Millennium Development Goal for 100% cover.

69. In 2015, under the Action Plan to the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons belonging to ethnic minorities, mobile settings were set in 17 regions for organising and

conducting preventive examinations and health tests of non-insured persons from Roma origin and persons with difficult access to medical facilities.

70. Health mediators play an important role for improving the access of children from marginalized communities to health care. The aim is to overcome cultural barriers in the communication between Roma communities and medical staff on the spot; to eliminate existing discrimination attitudes; to optimise the implementation of prevention programs, health education and active social work in the community.

71. Between 2008 and 2013, the number of health mediators working entirely with Roma communities has gradually increased and has reached 130 in 71 municipalities in 2014. Health mediators participate in immunization campaigns, prevention, treatment and diagnostic events in settlements and residential quarters where health uninsured Bulgarian citizens of Roma origin live.

72. Health mediators play a key role in the prevention of various diseases and improving the health status of Roma communities, as set out in the Action Plan for implementation of the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020).

73. Annually, activities for health prevention and promotion are organised and implemented among ethnic minorities, such as:

- Informing and counselling families from marginalized communities on the selection of a personal general practitioner;
- Immunization campaigns, preventive examinations, and on the spot surveys;
- Discussing with young mothers the importance of immunizations and motivating them for regular activity under the National Immunization Schedule;
- Conducting seminars and clarification campaigns, circulating health information materials, broadcasting video and audio clips on the importance of preventive examinations among Roma people, on understanding the methods for protection against widespread infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases, on the harm of most common risk factors like smoking, alcohol abuse, drugs use, junk food, sexually transmitted infections and the risk for newly-born babies, etc.

Paragraph 13

74. A Strategy for Reducing Early Drop-outs t from the Education System (2013-2020) was adopted in 2013. The Plan for implementation of the Strategy supports the key measures in the policies on prevention, intervention and compensation of premature dropping out and leaving of school. It focuses on implementing the main elements of the Strategy, as follows:

- Priority design of measures for prevention of school dropout;
- Enhanced information activities among stakeholders on the role of education and training in the development of individuals and the society;
- Design and approval of an early warning system.

75. The creation of a coordination mechanism for reporting the progress of implementation of the Strategy can be considered as significant progress, as it serves for intensified and improved cooperation of all stakeholders. Shared good practices at school, municipal and regional levels involve the application of an integrated approach and demonstrate consistent efforts of stakeholders in addressing school dropout. The importance of early child development is recognized as vital for successful continuation and development of the strengths of infants and students. The Strategy and the Plan for its implementation are focused on all children on equal basis.

Paragraph 14

76. Deprivation of liberty is a forceful placement of a convicted person in special facilities, limiting his/her ability for free movement, regime of living, social contacts and ability to exercise some rights, which are incompatible with the nature of the punishment. Minors serve their punishment in correctional facilities until reaching 18 years of age. In Bulgaria, there is only one facility of this type. It is within the structure of the MoJ, located in the town of Boychinovtsi. Under the PC, a minor may be released from criminal responsibility with a relevant correctional measure.

77. Release from criminal responsibility by applying correctional measures under the terms and procedure of the Control of Juvenile Anti-Social Behaviour Act (CoJASBA) is an option available to the prosecutor or the court, arising from the objective to impose punishments on juveniles, namely that they should be corrected and prepared for community service. The prosecutor or the court chooses this type of punishment when they consider that the objective of the punishment can be achieved by imposing a correctional measure. The offence committed by the minor should not present a high public threat.

78. Against minors who have committed socially dangerous acts and minors who have committed crimes and who are released from criminal responsibility under the PC, the following correctional measures are imposed:

- Warning;
- Obligation to apologize to the victim;
- Obligation to participate in counselling, trainings and programs for eliminating deviations in his/her behaviour;
- Placement under the educational supervision of the parents or their substitutes, with an obligation for taking intensive care;
- Placement under the educational supervision of a public educator;
- Ban to visit specific places and establishments;
- Ban to meet and contact specific persons;
- Ban to leave his/her present address;
- Obligation on the minor to eliminate the damage caused with his/her own labour, if this is within his/her ability;
- Obligation to do certain work to the benefit of society;
- Placement in a social-pedagogical boarding school;
- Warning for placement in an educational-correctional boarding school with a 6-month probation period;
- Placement in an educational-correctional boarding school.

79. Measures for placement in a social-pedagogical boarding school or educational-correctional boarding school are imposed only by the court and only when all other measures for impact have been exhausted. These two measures are deemed very severe, as they involve separation between child and family.

80. Should court find that the conditions set out in the PC exist, it may impose a correctional measure under the CoJASBA or transfer the case to the respective local commission for control of juvenile anti-social behaviour, for imposing a correctional measure. When the prosecutor decides not to institute pre-trial proceedings or to terminate

such proceedings, he/she sends the case to the commission for imposing a correctional measure.

81. The CoJASBA does not contain detailed criteria for determination of each correctional measure separately. Art. 21 of the CoJASBA provides that before imposing a correctional measure the local commission examines the correctional case and takes into account personal peculiarities of the offender, age, status, physical condition and mental development, the family environment, education and upbringing, the nature and gravity of the deed, the motives and circumstances in which it was committed, whether an effort has been made to eliminate the damages caused, the subsequent behaviour of the offender, previous infringements, measures and punishments imposed, as well as other circumstances of significance for the specific case. Afterwards, the commission issues a motivated decision, to, either:

- Impose a correctional measure under art. 13, paragraph 1, items 1-10 and 12;
- Table a proposal to the regional court for imposing a correctional measure under art. 13, paragraph 1, item 11 or 13 (i.e. placement in a social-pedagogical boarding school or educational-correctional boarding school);
- Submit the materials to the prosecutor, when it deems that the committed offence is a crime, save for the cases when the minor is released from penal responsibility under art. 61 of the PC; or
- Terminate the correctional case, when it establishes that no anti-social act has been committed or that it has not been committed by the minor or that the committed deed is apparently insignificant.

82. In the second of the abovementioned hypotheses, the regional court schedules the case within 14 days from its receipt and examines it in a closed court session, summoning the minor, the parents or their substitutes, the persons defending his/her rights and lawful interests, and a prosecutor from the relevant regional prosecutor's office. The court may gather new evidence. If the regional court imposes a correctional measure under art. 13, paragraph 1, item 11 or item 13, it may be appealed or protested before the district court by the parties within 14 days from its ruling.

83. The district court may confirm the appealed decision, repeal it and impose another correctional measure, or repeal the decision and terminate the case, when it finds that no anti-social behaviour has been committed or that it has not been committed by the minor or that the committed deed is apparently insignificant.

84. After completing the proceedings, the case is returned to the local commission for enforcement of the effective decision. Support from the authorities of the MoI may be requested.

85. In relation to the Mechanism for Countering School Abuse and Aggression among Students in School, approved by the Minister of Education and Science (Order No. РД 09-11-611/18.05.2012), actions have been taken for its application in social-pedagogical and educational-correctional boarding schools. This mechanism lays down specific actions in response to incidents or signals of violence, provides for the creation of coordination boards for planning, tracking and coordinating the efforts for addressing school abuse. It provides for keeping records of the cases of abuse or violence. Surveys are to be conducted among students on cases of abuse, with a view of creating guidelines for support.

86. In some boarding schools, there are self-governance student boards intended to support and assist the organisation of class and extracurricular activities.

87. In all social-pedagogical and educational-correctional boarding schools, boxes for filing complaints and signals have been placed. All children have been informed of the

ways to file a complaint. As a result of the supervision activity of the SACP, information about the National Telephone Number for Children 116 111 has been placed in the boarding schools at a visible place. It can be used by children free of charge for placing a signal of violence or abuse, for receiving information and advice on their rights.

88. Regular checks are made by the authorities entrusted with supervision functions: the SACP, the regional units of the Ministry of Education and Science – Regional Educational Inspectorates, and the National Preventive Mechanism to the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Paragraph 15

89. Protection of fundamental human rights is a guiding principle in the behaviour and actions of responsible officials in respect of aliens detained on the state border, who have expressed their willingness to be granted protection in Bulgaria.

90. Instructions have been sent to all border checkpoints on the Bulgarian-Turkish border regarding the manner of filing an application for protection in Bulgaria. Officials in the border checkpoints work in a 24/7 regime. Persons seeking asylum may exercise freely their right to seek protection to the bodies of the Border Police General Directorate of the MoI.

91. In order to provide the necessary information to aliens seeking protection, at the border checkpoints, in the premises for temporary placement of detained persons in the border-police departments, and in the centres for placement of aliens, there are leaflets and information materials in 7 languages, including the main languages of the countries of origin of the migrants.

92. The employees of the Border Police General Directorate of the MoI have received manuals and guidelines on protection and possible actions during detention of aliens on the state border. Special attention is paid during the daily briefings on the strict compliance to national and international legislation, and fundamental human rights.

93. An alien may state in person his/her desire to be granted international protection to an official of the SAR. When the application is filed to another state authority, the latter shall send it immediately to the SAR. Where an unaccompanied minor is concerned, the officials of the Border Police General Directorate of the MoI immediately inform the SACP and the Child Protection Department in the respective municipality.

94. In the border police departments, there are suitable premises for mothers and children, where unaccompanied children are placed until the coming of a social worker and transfer of the child to the SACP or the SAR.

95. Under the Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (FRBA), no unaccompanied minors shall be placed in special homes for temporary placement of aliens (SHTPA) to the Migration Directorate of the MoI. In accordance with art. 44, paragraph 9 of the FRPA "Involuntary detention does not apply to unaccompanied minors. The body which issued the imposing of the compulsory administrative measure shall notify the SAD, which takes measures to protect him/her under the Child Protection Act."

96. When families with children are placed in SHTPA, they receive relevant psychological, medical and logistic support, as aliens from vulnerable groups. They are transferred with priority in the SAR centres, after filing an application for protection.

97. The amendment to the Asylum and Refugees Act of 16.10.2015 introduced a new mechanism of representation of unaccompanied minors. A representative of the municipal administration must be appointed for every minor concerned, to cooperate with the SAR. Where a minor seeking or having been granted international protection is accompanied by a

full age person who is responsible for him/her under law or custom, this person must also be appointed as his/her representative by the municipal administration.

98. The representative of a minor seeking or having been granted international protection:

- Shall take care of his/her legal interests in the proceedings for granting of international protection until their completion with an enforced decision;
- Shall represent him/her before all administrative bodies, including social, health, educational and other institutions in Bulgaria;
- Shall play the role of a procedural representative in all proceedings before the administrative bodies; and
- Shall take actions to ensure legal aid.

99. The SAR exercises control and takes measures to protect minor children seeking international protection from physical or psychological violence, from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In order to be able to work with aliens from vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors, the employees of the SAR have undergone trainings from the European Asylum Support Office.

100. In accordance with the provisions of the Qualification Directive and the principles set out in the UN CRC "the best interests of the child" are of primary consideration when assessing the integrity of the family, together with the well-being and social development of the minor, security and safety related considerations, as well as the opinion of the minor depending on his/her age or maturity.

101. In the proceedings for granting international protection, the assessment of the best interests of the child is carried out in compliance with the provisions of art. 15, paragraph 4 of the CPA.

102. The reception centres of the SAR are of an open type and do not carry out "detention of asylum-seeking families with children".

103. For the time being, no action plan has been adopted for the integration of persons who have received international protection.

Paragraph 16

104. Identifying victims of trafficking, including children, is based on indicators and on the experience and skills of the employees of the specialised sector for combating trafficking in human beings (THB) at the Chief Directorate "Combating Organised Crime" of the MoI. The indicators for identification are published in a manual for identifying victims of THB. In a separate section of the manual, special indicators for identifying child victims of THB are published. The manual is distributed among numerous institutions and organisations. For the purposes of identifying victims of THB, including children, indicators are also published in the National Mechanism for Referral and Support of Victims of THB, prepared in 2010 by a group of experts from different institutions and organisations.

105. In addition, the issue of identifying the victims of THB is dealt with in a special section in the National Mechanism. The identification itself is divided in two types – informal and formal. They are described thoroughly and relevant authorised institutions and organisations are listed. The cases of identified victims of trafficking in children are indicated as special cases in the National Mechanism. It is explicitly specified that when identifying a child who is a victim of trafficking, the SACP and the MoI must be notified within 24 hours.

106. When identifying a child victim of THB, the Coordination Mechanism for Referral and Care of Cases of Unaccompanied Children and Children-Victims of Trafficking Returning from Abroad shall be put into practice.

107. The procedures for identification of victims also include procedures for risk assessment, identifying the urgent needs of the victim and referral to providers of services needed by the victim. When assessing the risk, special cases are considered, relating to children victims of trafficking. In this regard, it is expressly noted that in every case of a child victim of trafficking, the SACP notifies the SAD and provides all available information on the case.

108. The child protection department to the SAD studies the family and social environment of the child, prepares a risk assessment and an action plan. If sufficient data is available on involvement or use of the child in the activities referred to in art. 11 of the CPA, the chairperson of the SACP prepares a reasoned proposal or opinion to the Minister of Interior for imposing an administrative measure under art. 76a of the Bulgarian Identity Documents Act. The SAD prepares a report on the assessment of the child's needs and takes appropriate protection measures in accordance with the needs and interests of the child. Based on an order of the director of the SAD, the child is placed in a Crisis Centre. Within one month from issuance of the order for temporary placement of the child, the SAD shall file a request to the relevant regional court for the placement of the child under court procedure.

109. In the cases when the child is placed in a Crisis Centre based on a court decision (for a period of 1 to 6 months), support is provided and coordinated by social workers in charge of the child in the Centre. Upon expiry of the period for placement in a Crisis Centre the child is returned to his/her family environment or is placed in an institution, if the family does not have the necessary parental capacity to take care of the child or is involved in his/her trafficking. The child protection departments trace the case for a period of at least one year.

110. The child may afterwards be placed in another institution and the court shall issue a decision thereon. Long-term support of the child and his/her family is provided in accordance with the action plan by the Child Protection Department.

111. In regard to Bulgarian children-victims of trafficking who are abroad, the Coordination Mechanism for Referral and Care of Cases of Unaccompanied Children and Children-Victims of Trafficking Returning from Abroad is accountable. It is designed under the National Strategy for the Child and is aimed to ensure efficient coordination and interaction of all competent institutions for the return of Bulgarian children who have been victims of a crime abroad, including THB, and for their subsequent protection. When applying the mechanism, the competent institutions are guided by the principle for ensuring the best interests of the child with a multidisciplinary approach at national and local levels.

Paragraph 17

112. The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Roma Integration (2012-2020) was adopted by a Decision of the Parliament of 01.03.2012. The responsible institutions execute measures within their competences, and foresee the necessary resources from their budget and from relevant programs through the European funds or through other financing, e.g. the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, the Bulgarian-Swiss Program for Cooperation etc.

113. The existing legal framework for the pre-school and school education system creates conditions for equal access to education to all children and students, regardless of their ethnic origin. Normative requirements are established in support of activities related to the

education process of children and students for whom the Bulgarian language is not mother tongue.

114. Creating conditions for equal treatment and adaptation of children and students from ethnic minorities in the education environment is a priority for the Ministry of Education and Science. To this end, the following measures are taken:

- Adequate legal framework for the study of mother tongue
  - Article 8, paragraph 2 of the Public Education Act reads as follows: "Students whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, besides the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language, shall have the right to study their own mother tongue in the municipal schools under the protection and control of the State."
  - For the time being, curricula for study of Turkish, Hebrew and Armenian as mother tongues for 1st-8th grades have been approved, and curricula for study of Roma native language have been designed for 2nd-8th grades.
- "Folklore of ethnicities – Roma folklore" in the optional subject classes
  - Conditions are created for all students, regardless of their ethnic origin, in accordance with their desires, to opt for the subject "Folklore of ethnicities – Roma folklore" in optional classes. Training aids and notebooks for practice have been designed, acquainting the students with Roma history, customs and traditions. The training aids contain texts on the Roma way of living and culture, on different religions, ancient cultures and civilizations.

Paragraph 18

115. Bulgaria gives high priority to countering and prosecution of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, child pornography, and the fight against THB. Accordingly, the Bulgarian legislation in this field is brought to conformity with relevant international and European standards.

116. In 2007, Bulgaria ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against THB, and, in 2011, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. In order to transpose the requirements of those two international acts, the provisions of PC have been significantly amended and supplemented.

117. In the period 2013-2015, the efforts of the Bulgarian State were focused on bringing the national legislation in conformity with the measures taken by the EU for updating and elaborating the EU law in the area of sexual crimes against children and combating THB, through the adopted Directive 2011/36/EU and Directive 2011/92/EU.

118. In view of the full transposing of Directive 2011/36/EU amendments were made to the PC, the Combating THB Act and the CPA. The amendments provide that no prosecution shall be carried out or no punishment shall be imposed on a person who has been subject of THB for his/her participation in criminal activities which he/she was forced to commit as a direct effect of that capacity. Beggary, dispossession of a bodily organ, tissue, or cell of the victim are added as separate causes for prosecution of trafficking. Criminal responsibility is borne in the cases of THB committed by an official in pursuance of his/her official duties.

119. In the Combating of THB Act a new wording of the definition of THB is suggested. Also, the definition of the term "exploitation" is brought in conformity with the extended scope of the hypothesis of the THB crime. Extended is the obligation of the State to provide training to the children of victims of trafficking, not only to the children who are victims of trafficking. This entails separation of the victim from his/her children in the cases where the

victim is placed under the Combating of THB Act in a settlement other than the settlement of his/her customary residence. The scope of persons who are entitled to protection is extended under the CPA, adding victims of violence or exploitation whose age is not established but a reasonable assumption can be made that they are children.

120. On Directive 2011/92/EU, the proposed draft Act Amending and Supplementing the PC introduces only those rules of the Directive through which it supplements the standards of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. The amendments concern the following aspects:

- Release from prosecution or punishment of children who are victims of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in regard to their participation in specific criminal activities which they have been forced to commit. This shall not result in release from penal responsibility for the committed offence of its indirect offender who has exercised coercion on children or children who have been used for the production of pornography materials;
- The definition of "Pornography material" is modified and a definition of "Pornographic performance" is created;
- Expressly incriminated is molestation, copulation and rape, when it is committed with a child, involved in prostitution;
- Criminalized is contacting a person, who has reached the age of 14, for the purpose of lewdness, copulation, sexual intercourse, for producing pornography material or for participation in pornographic performance;
- Criminalized is persuasion of a child aged under 14 to participate or watch actual, virtual or simulated sexual acts through the use of force or threat, or through taking advantage of a state of dependence or supervision;
- Criminalized is persuasion of an underage child, through the use of force or threat or through taking advantage of a state of dependence or supervision, to participate in an actual, virtual or simulated sexual act;
- Precised is the provision for penal responsibility in cases of coercion, support or use of a person who has not reached the age of 18 or a group of such persons to participate in a pornographic performance; committing the above-mentioned crimes in respect of a person who has not reached the age of 14 and in cases where a material benefit has been received as a result of the above criminal acts;
- A legal provision is introduced for a person committing sexual abuse or sexual exploitation against children to be penalized, by depriving him/her of the right to hold specific government or public position or by depriving him/her from the right to practice specific profession or activity;
- the deliberate access through information or communication technology to pornography material, for the production of which a person under the age of 18 or a person appearing to be of that age has been used, is criminalized;
- Article 188 of the PC is amended to ensure normal ethic upbringing and sexual development of children by not involving them in prostitution.

121. Those amendments fully transpose the requirements of article 3, paragraph 1, letter "b" and article 3, paragraph 1, letter "c" of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography to the UN CRC.

Paragraph 19

122. The extraterritorial jurisdiction of the PC is described in its article 6, paragraphs 1 and 2: "The PC shall also apply to foreign citizens who have committed abroad crimes against peace and humanity, whereby the interests of another state or foreign citizens have been affected. The PC shall also apply to other crimes committed by foreign citizens abroad, where this is stipulated in an international agreement, to which the Republic of Bulgaria is a party".

123. The SAR performs the required inspections. At present, no case of a child involved in military actions has been identified.

Part II

(a) New bills and laws, and their respective regulations

124. The Pre-school and School Education Act was adopted and is into force from 08.01.2016. It provides for the following state educational standards as mandatory requirements for results in the system of pre-school and school education, as well as the conditions to achieve them:

- Pre-school education;
- Mastering of the Bulgarian literary language;
- School curriculum;
- General education;
- Specialised education;
- The acquisition of professional qualification;
- Inclusive education;
- Civic, health, environmental and intercultural education;
- Evaluating the results of student learning;
- Information and documents;
- Institutions;
- Physical environment, information and library provision of kindergartens, schools and centres of support for personal development;
- Cognitive books, textbooks and school kits;
- Professional development of teachers, directors and other pedagogical specialists;
- Quality management in institutions;
- Inspection of kindergartens and schools;
- Funding of the institutions;
- Standardisation and remuneration of labour;
- The organisation of activities in school education.

125. Information has been provided in Part I on the amendments to the ARA and the PC.

126. In 2015, amendments were introduced to the FAA, aimed at promoting responsible parenting and greater social justice.

127. Amendments to the Social Assistance Act were adopted on first reading in 2016. They aim to facilitate the registration and licensing of providers of social services; to improve accessibility to social services; and to fully guarantee the rights of consumers.

128. Amendments have been prepared to the CPC in order to transpose Directive 2012/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25.10.2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims. One of the main principles of the directive is the right of child victims to be heard in criminal proceedings.

129. A new Juvenile Justice Act is being prepared, covering all issues on children in conflict with the law. It would allow to the fullest extent a system of juvenile justice, which is based on children's rights and complies with the standards in the field of juvenile justice, while reflecting the Bulgarian traditions and best international experience.

130. Amendments to the Road Traffic Act and the Administrative Violations and Penalties Act have been prepared, aimed at improving the procedures for establishing violations of the traffic laws and imposing appropriate penalties.

131. A special Social Services Act in under preparation for the integration of all social services' issues in a single legislative act.

(b) Recently introduced policies, programmes and action plans, and their scope and financing

132. Strategy for Reducing the Share of Early Drop-outs (2013-2020) and the Plan of Implementation of the Strategy (2014-2015). A draft plan for 2016-2017 has been prepared. The Strategy gives specific reasons for early school leavings and drafts policies and measures for prevention, intervention and compensation of this phenomenon. Special attention is given to policies for access to education and improving the quality of education for children and students from vulnerable ethnic communities and those with special educational needs.

133. Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities and the Action Plan thereto for the period 2015-2020. The strategy sets four strategic objectives: complete socialization of children and students from ethnic minorities; ensuring equal access to quality education; promoting intercultural education; preservation and development of their cultural identity.

134. National Strategy to Reduce Poverty and Promote Social Inclusion and an Action Plan for the period 2015-2016 for its implementation. They contain measures and actions, indicators, responsible institutions, financing sources and terms of execution in the field of active involvement in the labour market, the development of cross-cutting services for social inclusion, sustainability, adequate social payments, etc.

(c) Recent ratifications of human rights instruments

135. In addition to information recently brought to the attention of UN bodies (Common Core Document – HRI/CORE/BGR/2014 and National Report under the Second Cycle of the UPR – A/HRC/WG.6/22/BGR/1), Bulgaria ratified Protocol No. 15 amending the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Part III

136. Data and statistics from this part may be consulted in Annex 1.